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## Twenty Years A-Growing—The Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests in the Philippines

*by Sean Coyle, CSSC - August 8, 1998*

Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales of Lipa, then auxiliary in Manila, started the first Philippine fraternity of the Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests in 1978. He learned of the Fraternity from the Little Sister of Jesus who had come to the country two years before that and with whom he used to celebrate Mass regularly. A group of Redemptorists in Cebu got a fraternity going there shortly afterwards. In 1979 some Columbans in Mindanao established a fraternity in Ozamiz. The traces its origins to a Fraternity retreat made by one of them in Dublin in 1976 which was given by Charles Walker of England and the late Peter Lemass of Dublin.

The three original fraternities have had their ups and downs but still exist. The Ozamiz one is now based in Marawilligan. Des Hartford, one of the original members, is the Apostolic Administrator of the Prelature of St. Maryís, Marawi, which is 94% Muslim. All of the Prelatureís priests are members.

Around 1980 or 1981 - your scribe is working from memory - we had a retreat in Cebu given by Les Cashen (?) who was then responsible in Australia. That was the first time that a group of fraternities had come together in the Philippines. We chose Leo Tumulak of Cebu as our national responsible. He is now Bishop of Tagbilaran in Bohol. We had one or two similar gatherings during subsequent years. One problem we encountered was that some bishops, with all good will, sent some of their priests to these in order to make their annual retreat. This somewhat diffused the focus of the meetings.

From July 27 to 31 of this year, we held our National Assembly in Dumaguete City in the southeast of the island of Negros. 36 attended, including Brother Bernard Jagueneau of the Little Brothers of Jesus, a regular at our assemblies, and Sister Marguerite of the Little Sisters of Jesus. Keiko Shimada, the community leader of the L'Arche Community near Manila came with Lala, a young woman originally from Cebu who is now in L'Arche. Lala is one of God's special people and has a special gift for welcoming and for bringing out the playful in others. L'Arche and its sister-movement, Faith and Light, have been very close to the de Foucauld Family in the Philippines. Keiko, who is Japanese, has a sister who is a Little Sister of Jesus and has been working in Afghanistan.

One of the characteristics of the Fraternity in the Philippines has been its international dimension. The Redemptorists and Columbans who started fraternities in Cebu and Ozamiz were from Ireland. The latter, now in Iligan/Marawi, includes Filipino, American, French and Irish members, diocesan, Columbans, Franciscans and a Paris Foreign Missionary. A fraternity in Cebu, which dissolved when its members were scattered to the four corners of the world, had seven members from seven different countries.



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In some ways this international aspect was a drawback as the Fraternity is basically a movement of diocesan priests. Another drawback was that some of the most active members were bishops. It is a delicate matter for a bishop to encourage his priests to join the Fraternity. However, the majority of members now are diocesan priests and the majority of fraternities consist only of diocesan priests. There are about 11 and most are still experiencing growing pains. Some have fallen on lean times and some have disappeared. The recent National Assembly expressed concern about this and hopes to have the assistants of the National Responsible, Monsignor Benjamin Sabillo of the Archdiocese of Palo, Leyte, visit the existing fraternities during the year and get permission from bishops to speak to their clergy about the Fraternity. Ben will be on study leave in Baguio this year with a group of priests whom the bishops hope to have working with their priests in on-going formation.

This year's National Assembly was, I think, the seventh. One of those present was Bishop Antonio Tobias of San Fernando, La Union, in the north of the country. Bishop Tony was one of the original members but, like your scribe, has been a Lone Ranger for some years. In his former diocese of Paladin, in Mindanao, he helped establish a fraternity and would dearly love to see some in his present diocese.

The Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests is now established in the Philippines. But as Archbishop Dency Rosales said to us in Dumaguete, the time has come to announce ourselves to our brother priests. This is a challenge especially for diocesan priests. Those of us who are missionaries from overseas can lend our quiet support by our commitment as members. It is not that easy for members of fraternities on different islands to meet each other. The Assembly was a real boost to all of us who were there. We were blessed too to have four bishop-members present and the active involvement of Bishop Angel Lagdameo of Dumaguete, in our activities.

Over the years we have had the occasional Lone Ranger who may, like Brother Charles, not yet have found brothers in his own diocese but tries to live according to the spirit of the Fraternity. In my own case, I am a vocation director and am on the move most of the time.

Thank God, the Fraternity now definitely belongs to the diocesan priests of the Philippines and, with God's help, they will help it grow in every jurisdiction of the Church here. May the next twenty years be years of deepening of roots as well as growth of more branches.